



GNOME SWEET GNOME

If you were producing a movie, you would like to have a big star to play the lead. But the fantasy movie, *Upworld* (Vestron Video) needed somebody small, very small. In fact we're talking gnome-like. Because the picture is all about a gnome

Stan, Stan the *Upworldly* mobile man has tried his hand at everything from doing the FX on movies like *Predator* to directing his own, Vestron's *Upworld* is the latest. Matthew Hopkins shared a smoke with Oscar winning Mr. Winston.

named Gnorm (the 'G' is not silent) who comes up from the netherworld to aid L.A.P.D. cop Anthony Michael Hall hunt down a gang of dangerous jewel thieves.

Says director Stan Winston, 'People thought that the only way this movie could be done was with a little person playing the part, and that was not an idea that was exciting to anyone. My feeling, on reading the script, was exactly the opposite that it need not be a little person, that it would be a fantasy character and we would bring him to life. I had the technology, or would develop it with the group I've been working with for years.' Steve Austin eat your heart out!

Winston does indeed have the technology. Although *Upworld* is only his second feature as a director, he is already very well known and respected within the film industry for his special effects genius. Over the last five years Stan and his team (who operate from a large studio in Northridge, California) have contributed startling effects to many of the biggest genre flicks around, from *The Thing* to *Leviathan*, from *The Monster Squad* to *The Terminator* and *Predator*. A recipient of a number of Oscar nominations, Winston finally landed an Academy Award for his creature effects in *Aliens*.

Born in Arlington, Winston

graduated from the University of Virginia with a degree in fine arts and drama. He moved to California with hopes of pursuing an acting career. 'I started looking around for an agent,' he explains, 'but this wasn't as easy as I had thought, and I had to find a way to support myself. I had always enjoyed doing theatrical make-up in college, so I called around the studios to see if I could find a way to apply my talent.'

This led to a three-year apprenticeship at Walt Disney Studios, where Winston learned

lopping the head from a captured America G.I. The most startling thing about this horrendously graphic decapitation was that the severed head hung on a thread of flesh afterwards, the mouth still gasping for breath! 'Audiences went wild over that one,' he chuckles. 'Of course all we did was build a fully articulated mechanical head operated by cable controls that ran through the piece of the neck still connected...' Simple, really.

Stan received his very first Oscar nomination for his work on the underrated science-fiction comedy, *Heartbeeps* (CIC). His other early film credits include stints on *The Wiz* (CIC), *W.C. Fields And Me* (CIC), *Something Wicked This Way Comes* (Buena Vista), *The Man In The Glass Booth*, and John Carpenter's version of *The Thing* (CIC). Most of the eye-popping make-up effects for the latter were handled by Rob Bottin, but Winston was called in to create the bizarre dog-thing that results from the alien's absorbing of a half dozen Alsatians.

Winston designed the creature as a huge articulated puppet run by a complex series of cable controls. 'I knew I had done a good job,' he grins, 'when I came out of the cinema after the preview and heard somebody complaining, 'I don't like movies where they mistreat animals.' Of course I had made up the dogs in my workshop!'

He worked with John Carpenter again on *Starman* (RCA/Columbia Video), then created the impressive monster brains that were seen in Tobe Hopper's otherwise mediocre remake of *Invaders From Mars* (Warner Home Video). 'But by this time I was anxious to get into directing' he explains. 'So when Jim Cameron offered me the chance to do the effects for *The Terminator* (Virgin), I managed to talk him into letting me handle the second unit work as well.' This meant he was responsible for directing such action sequences as the oil tanker explosion near the end of the picture. Cameron was so



make-up and special effects under the tutelage of Robert Schiffer, head of Disney's make-up department. While there, he worked on various Disney features including *Bedknobs And Broomsticks*, and created masks for *Disney On Parade*, a travelling ice show. He left Disney in 1972 and went on to win his first 'Emmy' (a TV Oscar) for his work on the television movie, *Gargoyles*. A second one soon followed for his spectacular ageing make-up for Cicely Tyson in *The Autobiography Of Miss Jane Pittman*. Since then he has received four more Emmy nominations, for *Roots*, *The Diana Ross Special* (!), *Pinocchio*, and a *Star Wars Special*.

Stan first came to the attention of horror buffs with his startling work on the vigilante thriller, *The Exterminator* (Braveworld). The opening scenes were set in Vietnam, with a Vietcong torturer casually

pleased with the results that he called him back to do second unit work on *Aliens* (CBS Fox Video) as well.

Not long after this, Stan made his fully fledged directorial debut with *Vengeance The Demon*, the tale of a storekeeper who unleashes a vengeful monster on the city kids who accidentally killed his son, it was a creepy tale that featured some stunning creature effects. 'The skin of the demon's head contained 19 tiny servo-mechanisms,' explains Winston, 'which allowed us, through radio-controlled offscreen mechanics, to create all kinds of fantastic facial expressions.'

Stan also contributed to *The Monster Squad* (Braveworld), coming up with new designs for the movie's classic monsters. 'Because they were classic monsters, coming up with new make-up variations was much harder,' he explains. 'We wanted to maintain a faithful look about the creatures, yet still make them different enough so that we didn't have lawyers breathing down our necks for copyright infringement. It was a fine line to straddle, but I think we pulled it off.'

No such problems existed on their work on *Predator* (CBS Fox Video), but they had to get their act together double quick for the Schwarzenegger hit because they were called in at the eleventh hour when 20th Century Fox rejected the monster created by another effects house. 'I hired 22 guys and we all went down to Mexico for four weeks, basically to keep the creature's makeup intact. We put that monster together, from design to construction, in about five weeks. It shows what can be accomplished when everyone pulls together.'

Other popular movies that Winston has worked on recently include *Alien Nation* and *Leviathan*, the latter involving the creation of a yukky, *Thing*-like genetic mutation. Stan thinks of his screen creatures as characters, not special effects. He explains that, 'to create a special character for the screen is exactly what an actor does.' But directing

movies is where he feels his future lies. 'I feel very fortunate to be directing because I'm doing everything I wanted to do vicariously from the start.'

He describes the making of *Upworld* as 'the most fun I've in my professional career. I was surrounded by creative people who wanted to do something special and, as the director, all I had to do was make the right choices. As an artist, I think that the most exciting thing that can happen to you is to be surrounded by other artists, and in this situation I was fortunate enough to have that



happen. I think that the very best choices were made in the casting of the film, and I had an unusually wonderful relationship with Anthony Michael Hall. There was a constant flood of ideas, not only from the cast, but from the crew as well. There was a constant glut of creative energy.'

So how did he decide on the design of Gnorn the gnome? Winston replies, 'The original screenplay depicted the character as much more animal-like. My feeling was that I wanted to create something that people would accept as human, even though he is strange-looking and distorted, a strange, distorted human being. He's a little man, not a little animal. I felt that every feature about him needed to be human, distorted

but human, so in fact he stands upright, he has two arms and two legs, he has hands, not claws or paws.

'Gnorn is different from the other characters I've created in my studio in that he's much more alive. He has more character, a complete character, a complete range of emotions, a complete range of expressions. You can almost tell what he's thinking! His eyes are bigger than a normal person's, he hairier than a normal person, but he's still more 'normal' than monstrous. Gnorn is the type of person who you look at, and if you're with your mother, she says "Don't stare!"

After Gnorn had been sketched out he was then sculpted in clay. A mould was taken, and foam rubber copies were made, which were painted and covered with individually implanted hair. Several heads were then created, each with a different facial expression (normal, mean, shouting, sleepy, etc).

All the individual facial features were operated by remote control, with one technician operating a control board for each feature. The man who created Gnorn's voice (actor Will Ryan) wore a headpiece that operated Gnorn's jaw so that Gnorn's jaw movements would exactly match his own.'

The result of their labours is a bizarre, incredibly life-like creature who stands about three feet tall, has large hands, ears and feet, and a wide-eyed expressive face. His grimy skin is bronzed and crinkled, and his clothes are made from mud-covered cloth and crudely-sewn leather. Winston has also done a sterling job as director of *Upworld*, constructing a memorable fantasy-cum-oddball-buddy-movie that will appeal to kids of all ages. If it's the huge financial success it deserves to be, we won't have heard the last of Gnorn the gnome.

'A sequel is definitely on the cards,' concludes Stan with a grin, 'providing Gnorn doesn't get himself a good agent and price himself out of the market!'